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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language and English-language dailies gave significant reporting and editorial coverage December 12 to AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt's press briefing Tuesday, in which he severely criticized Taiwan's UN referendum and urged President Chen Shui-bian to keep his pledge. News coverage also focused on Taiwan's Legislative Yuan, which on Tuesday passed the budget to purchase four PAC-3 missile systems and the budget for assessing the possibility to procure diesel-powered submarines. The pro-unification "United Daily News" front-paged a banner headline that said "Raymond Burghardt Slams 'UN Referendum as Going through the Back Door; [the Referendum] Appears to Have Dodged But Actually Has Violated the Four Noes and Caused Trouble." The newspaper also ran a banner headline on page four that said: "The United States Discloses Its Bargaining Chips: Will Not Allow Bian to Do What He Pleases." The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" also ran a banner headline on page four that read "Raymond Burghardt: UN Referendum is a Clever Way Which Goes through the Back Door."

2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" urged Washington to respect and affirm Taiwan's UN bid because it is aimed at expressing the Taiwan people's desire to make Taiwan into a normal country. An editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said that AIT Chairman Burghardt's remarks Tuesday fully indicated Washington's mistrust and doubts about President Chen's integrity. End summary. [Ed. Note: Public Affairs staff was released early today to attend AIT's annual Christmas party. More media reaction on Burghardt visit will follow tomorrow.]

A) "'UN Bid' Is Aimed at Expressing the Voice of [the Taiwan] People's Hearts, and the United States Should Respect and Affirm It"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (12/12):

"... Even though the United States has made many comments on Taiwan's UN referendum lately, its position remains the same when it talks about Taiwan's defense issues. While criticizing the UN referendum as 'neither necessary nor helpful' in early December, AIT Taipei Director Stephen Young also reiterated that, under the 'Taiwan Relations Act,' the United States will continue close cooperation [with Taiwan], assist Taiwan to address security challenges from China, and will approve the sales of appropriate defensive weapons [to the island] that are aimed at ensuring Taiwan's self-defense capabilities. It is obvious that China can hardly get what it wishes when it exerts pressure on the United States regarding this issue. ...

"During November alone, the military relationship between China and the United States has dropped from its highest point of establishing a hotline to the lowest point, when USS Kitty Hawk sailed through the Taiwan Strait. All these developments indicated that [building] mutual trust between Chinese and the U.S. militaries is not an easy

matter. Over the past few years, the rapid growth of China's defense budgets and its low military transparency have long aroused concerns in the region. In addition, China's evident intent to seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region has challenged the United States' strategic interests in the region; as long as China's [evil] ambition remains, the chances are slim for China and the United States to live together in peace. But a look back at Taiwan shows that the island is trying to express in a democratic way the voice and desire of its 23 million people to make Taiwan a normal country. Such a move is fully consistent with the UN's principles and procedures of peace, and it deserves the United States' respect and affirmation."

B) "It is Bian's Integrity that Raymond Burghardt Questions"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] editorialized (12/12):

"AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt said yesterday that the UN referendum has violated the Four Noes pledge, and he hopes that President Chen will 'ensure that Taiwan's new president will have an opportunity to deal with cross-Straits relations; that the new president can make his own decisions without his hands being tied; and that there will be a peaceful change of leadership.' Burghardt used a series of negative sentences and doubtful tones in his talk, which fully indicated the United States' mistrust of President Chen.

What is worse is that such mistrust does not come from [Washington's] objective assessment of Taiwan's environment but from its understanding of Bian's personality and character; [Washington] believes that Bian may well act recklessly, and this is certainly a disparagement of Bian.

"Burghardt said that, even though it appears that the UN referendum does not violate the Four Noes pledge, the United States believes that it has done so and said that the Taiwan government did it

through the back door. Judged from the perspective of [Taiwan's] sovereignty, Burghardt has indeed rudely interfered with Taiwan's internal affairs. But the UN referendum under the name Taiwan has indeed had the intent to perpetrate a hoax; it is a referendum intended to change [Taiwan's] national name in disguise, which has violated the second of the 'Four Noes' pledge -- that [Taiwan] 'will not change its national name.' This is what Burghardt meant by 'through the back door.' Why did the United States openly interfere with Taiwan's domestic affairs then? Besides the fact that Washington did not interfere with [Taiwan's] internal affairs since the U.S. government does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state, the United States is legally obliged to defend Taiwan, so it surely has the right to intervene and stop Taiwan from starting a war, which will result in the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers. The Bian administration must realize that.

"Burghardt's [open] opposition to the UN referendum was also aimed at showing it to Beijing. But the most extraordinary and sternest part of his talk this time was his warning to Bian that he must not tie the new president's hands and his demand that Bian ensure a peaceful change of leadership. In terms of diplomacy, [Burghardt's remarks] indicated overwhelming mistrust and humiliation against the president of a host country and were thus extremely rude. ... How come Chen Shui-bian has caused such worries, doubts and given Taiwan's major ally such an impression? Bian must clarify this himself. ..."

YOUNG